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**RHEA FAMILY PAPERS
1769-1859**

(THS Collection)

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INTRODUCTION

These papers of the Rhea family, which immigrated to America in 1769, cover the period, 1769-1859. The Rhea Family papers were given to the Tennessee Historical Society by Anne Rhea Backman Hyde (Mrs. Charles Robert), great-great-granddaughter of the Reverend Joseph Rhea.

The materials in this collection measure .84 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials.

Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Rhea Family Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Rhea Family Papers, containing approximately 300 items, cover three generations, 1769-1859. The collection is composed of commissions in the state militia, correspondence, diaries, genealogical data, land records, legal documents (including the will of Matthew Rhea, dated March 8, 1816), maps, school books, and writings.

Approximately half of the correspondence is from Congressman John Rhea to his brother, James, in Blountville, Tennessee, and deals with political events during the period 1801-1821. Letters from Andrew Agnew, merchant of Baltimore, comment on trade conditions and prices in 1815; on fears entertained for the fate of "Orleans"; and the "bravery of General Jackson " and "want of necessary forces" being provided by the Government. The letter of P. Parsons to John Rhea in Congress decries the negligence of Government in preparation for war. There are two letters from John Sevier, 1791, concerning supplies and the raising of levies for the state militia; a letter from Gerard Troost to Matthew Rhea concerning geological matters; and other correspondence dealing with land transactions in Tennessee and Ohio, maps of Matthew Rhea, the geology of Tennessee, postal service, and family affairs.

There are five circular letters: John Rhea to his constituents in 1809 and in 1821; William C.C. Claiborne to his constituents in 1801; William Carroll, 1821, announcing his bid for the governorship; and Matthew Rhea, 1844, in regard to the Female Academy in Somerville, Tennessee, of which he was president. Other correspondents include Andrew Agnew, Col. Arthur Campbell, William C.C. Claiborne, William Carroll, Lyman C. Draper, R. Farquharson, G.W. Featherstonhaugh, Joseph McMinn, R.J. Meigs, James Rhea, Joseph Rhea, John Sevier, Gerard Troost and F.K. Zollicoffer.

A journal was kept by the Reverend Joseph Rhea on his voyage to America in the brig "George" in 1769. The commonplace book of James Rhea, spanning the years 1810-1857, contains a few accounts, a little family news, one or two recipes, and sundry comments.

School books used by three generations of the Rhea family are in the collection: one in Latin published in London in 1668; a book on logic in Latin, published in Edinburgh in 1729; and three Latin grammar books printed in 1731, 1735, and 1752, respectively.

The maps are drawn by Matthew Rhea, geographer, and are of Anderson, Blount, Carter, Claiborne, Grainger, Greene, Hawkins, Jefferson and Cocke, Knox, Lincoln, Perry and Shelby counties and the French Broad and Holston Country in Tennessee; Jackson, Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison, Jackson, Franklin, Lawrence, and Morgan counties in Alabama; and Campbell County in Tennessee.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Joseph Rhea

- 1715 Born – Donegal, Ireland – son of Matthew Rhea, II – of Scotch-Irish descent
- 1742 Took degree at Univ. of Glasgow
- 1752 Married Elizabeth McIlwaine
- 1769 Immigrated with family to America; settled at Philadelphia, PA
- 1771 Moved to Piney Creek, MD – next year began to preach there
- 1775 Went to the Holston Country, Tennessee, to locate land – purchased about 2,000 acres in what is now Sullivan County, Tennessee
- 1776 As chaplain, accompanied military expedition to Tennessee (with troops of Col. Christian) and to VA – with another chaplain, Rev. Cummins. These men were the first ministers to preach in the territory which is now Tennessee
- 1777 Died in Maryland, while making arrangements to sell his Maryland land and move to Sullivan county, Tennessee
- 1778 His widow and family reached home in Sullivan County, Tennessee
Children:
John, 1753-1832; Matthew, IV, 1755-1816; Margaret, 1757-1822 – m. Robert Preston, 1750-1833; William, 1761-1836; Joseph, 1762-1825; Elizabeth, 1767-1821 – m. Major Robert Rhea, 1784-1841
Samuel, 1769-1843
James, 1774-1845

Sources:

Rhea Mss

Marsh, Dwight M. – *The Tennessean in Persia and Koordistan, being scenes incidents in the life of Samuel Audley Rhea* – Philadelphia, 1869

Armstrong, Zella, comp. – *Notable southern families*, v. 2 – Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1922

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Rhea

- 1753 Born – Langhorn, County Londonderry, Ireland – oldest son of Rev. Joseph Rhea
- 1769 Immigrated with parents to America, settling in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania
- 1771 Moved with parents to Piney Creek, Maryland
- 1778 Came to acreage purchased by father in Sullivan Co., Tennessee, with family (father died in 1777)
- 1780 Graduated from Princeton University [may not be the same John Rhea as listed graduating – John Rhea was in the Battle of King 's Mountain in Oct., 1780] – Revolutionary War participant in Battle of Brandywine also and listed as a soldier in 1778
- 1785 Returned to Ireland to bring back the widow Breden [Borden?] and her three daughters. His brothers married the sisters – William married Elizabeth, Joseph married Frances, and Samuel married Nancy
- 1785-90 Clerk of Sullivan County court in proposed state of Franklin and subsequently in North Carolina
- 1789 Licensed to practice law in Knoxville; member of North Carolina legislature; delegate to North Carolina convention that ratified the Federal Constitution
- 1796 Member of the constitutional convention that framed the first constitution of Tennessee
- 1796-97 Member of Tennessee House of Representatives
- 1803-15 U.S. Congressman (Democrat) from the First District
- 1816 Elected one of the commissioners to treat with the Choctaws

- 1817-23 U.S. Congressman (6 years chairman of committee on post offices and roads – for 1st 6 years until 1823 chairman of committee on pensions and Revolutionary claims; actively connected with higher education in Tennessee)
- 1823 Retired from active pursuits to the Rhea Plantation near Blountville, Tennessee; throughout his life acquired vast tracts of land in Tennessee and other states and was thought a wealthy man in his day
- 1832 May 27 – died at “Old Ireland,” near Blountville at the home of his brother, Joseph

Sources:

Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress, 1928, ed. Taylor, Oliver.
Historic Sullivan... Bristol, Tennessee, 1909
Caldwell, Joshua W. *Sketches of the bench and bar of Tennessee*, Knoxville, 1898

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Matthew Rhea, IV

- 1755 Born – Ireland – second son of Rev. Joseph Rhea and Elizabeth McIlwaine Rhea
- 1769 Immigrated with parents to America, settling at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 1771 Moved with family to Piney Creek, Maryland
- 1778 Came to Sullivan County, Tennessee with mother and brothers (father d. 1777)
- 1780 In Revolutionary War – attained rank of major – was in Battle of Guilford Court House, among others
- 1790 Appointed clerk of Sullivan County Court

Children of Matthew Rhea IV and Jane Preston Rhea:

Joseph Matthew, 1789-1860

Robert Preston, 1791-1872

Margaret, (1802-1886) married (1) Nicholas Long (2) James
Dysart Rhea

Matthew V, 1795-1870

Sources:

- Armstrong, Zella, comp. *Notable southern families, II*. Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1922
Sullivan County
Rhea papers (WPA transcribed records)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

James Rhea

- 1774 Born – Maryland, one of two Rhea brothers to be born in America, rather than in Ireland – youngest son of Rev. Joseph Rhea and Elizabeth McIlwaine Rhea
- 1778 Moved to Sullivan County, Tennessee with family (father d. 1777)
- 1801 Postmaster at Blountville, Tennessee
- 1814 Owned general store, on which the license expired
- 1815 ca. January – married Elizabeth (Eliza) Snapp, 1832-1857
- 1816 Owned saw mill on Beaver Creek
- 1817 First flour ground at his mill
- 1819 Posted bond with Samuel Rhea, Jr., for his postmaster appointment
- 1831 Wished to sell his mills on Beaver Creek – no buyer
- 1833 Had property, “Rheamont,” surveyed
- 1837 John Rhea and Samuel Rhea (James’ son) began to sell goods in James Rhea’s house

Children of James and Elizabeth Rhea:

Margaret, 1815-1898, m. (1832) John Snapp; James Quintas, 1818-1883; James, II, 1820-1891; Elizabeth, 1823-1829; Frances (Fanny), 1825-1888; Samuel, 1829-1902; Theodorick Bland, 1831-Theodora Bland, 1833-1868

Sources:

Rhea Mss – James Rhea diary
Sullivan County, Tennessee, Rhea papers (WPA transcribed records)
Armstrong, Zella comp. *Notable southern families, II*. Chattanooga, TN, 1922

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Matthew Rhea, V

- 1795 Born near Bluff City, Sullivan County, Tennessee – son of Matthew Rhea (1755-1816)
- 1818 Married Mary Looney of Middle Tennessee
- 1819 December 2 – Moved to West Tennessee
- 1830-34 “of Maury County” Tennessee
- 1832 With cousin, Joseph Campbell Rhea, made an early map of the state of Tennessee land survey (ALA, KY, TN [Counties of Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Carter, Claiborne, Cocke and Jefferson, Grainger, Greene, Hawkins, Knox, Lincoln, Perry, and Shelby])
- 1855-60 Addressed at “Somerville, Fayette County;” president, Female Institute of Somerville; man of great learning with special interest in history

Children:

Margaret, 1820-1880
Elizabeth, 1822-1892
Ellen Preston
Sarah Lucinda
John William, 1828-
Abram, 1830-1912
Matthew, VI
Mary Annis
Samuel Doak
Jennett Preston
Walter Preston, 1841-1880
Ellen Preston, 1844-
Frances Bell, 1848-

Sources:

Armstrong, Zella, comp. – *Notable southern families*, v.2 – Chattanooga, 1922
Sullivan Co., Rhea papers (WPA transcribed records)

CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

1. Accounts, Bills, Notes, Receipts
2. Correspondence – Agnew to Northrup
3. Correspondence – Parsons to Zollicoffer
4. Correspondence – Rhea, James - Outgoing
5. Correspondence – Rhea, John to Constituents
6. Correspondence – Rhea, John to James Rhea and Matthew Rhea
7. Correspondence – Brown, John
8. Deeds, Grants, Indentures
9. Diaries
10. Drawings
11. Genealogical data
12. Hymn Book
13. Legal Documents
14. Maps – Alabama – Jackson Co.
15. Maps – Alabama – Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison, Jackson, Franklin, Lawrence and Morgan Co.
16. Maps – Alabama – Limestone Co.

Box 2

1. Maps – Tennessee – Anderson Co.
2. Maps – Tennessee – Blount Co.
3. Maps – Tennessee – Campbell Co.
4. Maps – Tennessee – Carter Co.
5. Maps – Tennessee – Claiborne Co.
6. Maps – Tennessee – Grainger Co.
7. Maps – Tennessee – Greene Co.
8. Maps – Tennessee – Hawkins Co.
9. Maps – Tennessee – Jefferson and Cocke Co.
10. Maps – Tennessee – Knox Co.
11. Maps – Tennessee – Lincoln Co.
12. Maps – Tennessee – Perry Co.
13. Maps – Tennessee – Shelby Co.
14. Maps – Tennessee – French Broad and Holston Country
15. Military Papers
16. School Books
17. School Notes
18. Surveys of Rhea Land
19. Writings
20. Miscellaneous

NAME INDEX

This is a name index of the correspondence only in the Rhea Family Papers, together with the dates of the letters and information regarding their contents. The figures in parentheses denote the number of letters, if more than one. The last numbers refer to the box and folder in which the material is to be found.

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Cabeen, Thomas B. (3), 1858-1859, 1-3
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Cury, George (1), 1814, 1-3
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Preston, Walter (1), 1799, 1-4
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Rhea, John (30), 1801-1821, (includes two printed circulars, 1809; 1821), 1-4, 1-6, 1-7
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